

I know ^{a lot} ~~all~~ about institutions. I think I'm the only one that was raised by them. I grew up in Children's Homes, foster homes & the church. I was a nurse for 18 years - a lot of it on Welfare Island in N.Y. Taught school for 8 years, and have been working in or for the church for 22 years. I once worked for the Metropolitan Crime Commission, was a nurse & a social service agency and am back working in a public health service. ~~etc~~ I was a ~~mother for a while~~ + got to know the Department of Social Services, the Edison Gas ~~Co.~~, the Water Board and my bank from the underside. I was even arrested once at a civil rights disturbance and have had some contact w/ the Police Dept. I don't think I need to go on - I have had my day w/ institutions.

When Matthew Fox talks about institutionalism as one of the dragons that can do you in on your spiritual walk, I can only say "Amen". Most of us who have worked for large institutions or run afoul of them can talk very honestly of how soul-destroying they are.

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~~For~~ contrasts the dehumanizing professionalism of institutions & the ~~personal/spiritual~~ ^{personal/spiritual} which W.B. Yeats once said ~~were~~ were "terrors to children & ignominious to lovers" with a personal/spiritual God in human experience.

I would like to explore & you some
of the sensual images of God as
the scripture opens them to us,
and as our human experience lets
us know ourselves as sensual beings:

To walk barefoot in grass or sand is sensual.
To laugh ^{to eat} to burp, to make love is sensual,
To take a warm shower is sensual;
To take a hot bath is very sensual,
To sleep under the stars is sensual.
To swim, dance, or smell lilacs is sensual.
To hear opera, watch dancers, to pick
corn is sensual.
~~To have~~ To give birth is sensual
To be in darkness listening to a cello
is sensual.
To cry is sensual.
To hug a baby or get a backrub is sensual.
To be alive is very, very sensual.

Sensuality and ecstasy are related. If
ecstasy, in the religious sense, is an
experience of God, then God-consciousness
is sensual.

Sensual experiences are embodied experiences.
Bonhoeffer, in jail, says

"I should like to feel the full force
of the sun again, making the
skin hot & the whole body glow -
reminding me that I'm a
corporeal being. I should like
to be tired by the sun, instead
of by books & thoughts. I should
like to have it awaken my animal
existence - I should like, not
just to see the sun & sip it a little,
but to experience it bodily."

A sensual spirituality isn't one that merely tolerates the experiences of the senses - or worse tries to put to death the senses. A sensual spirituality is in touch with our bodies & ~~the~~ gifts of our senses - fingers, eyes, ears, noses, tongue & imagination, nerves, brain & the God of all these gifts.

Being in touch = our sensuality, we are also thankful people - we know the ultimate thanksgiving in Eucharist, in generosity, in justice.

There are some qualities that accompany a sensual experience radical enough to be called spiritual.

1. We are participants - participation in life's mysteries is at the core of this way of life which rejects a problem-solving, control-oriented attitude ^{on one hand} or a mortification-asceticism orientation on the other.
2. Sensual spirituality is unitive - we become one = the music, the dance, the food, the body, the person of God.
3. Matter, body, and our senses are important. We participate through our senses - and our bodies become doors - the medium is the message.

and the more keenly our senses are attuned the richer, more sensitive more expansive the spiritual experience. We praise God the Creator of all matter and unite in the Creator's material creation. We are not, however, materialistic - we are not one with the creations of the institutions, ~~our~~ ^{our} dollar bills, ~~the~~ ^{our} automobiles, our possessions. God is the author of matter; humanity the creator of materialism. Liberation of the former is holy; worship of the latter is idolatry.

A sensual spirituality can also be a feminist spirituality. Women seem to be related to matter in special ways. Maybe there's some truth to Mother Earth + the breast-ness of the hills. Matter + mother as a point of truth are from the same root word in Latin. Fear of the sensual, in our society, is fear of the feminine. The church has often, ^{in its history} feared women. Feminist spirituality, gay spirituality are embodied spiritualities + embrace the sensual.

Contrast, if you will, all the images you can think of of institutions. Often they are body-exploiting, deny the richness of the senses + give us clamor, control, and promises of success on which the value of human beings is based - instead of the assurance

of acceptance for just being oneself.

In MCC, we have been trying to reclaim embodiment, to uphold our right to sensual spirituality, to witness to an incarnational theology.

Tonight's scripture gives us at least two very sensual images - one of God, one of Jesus. God as maternal being - on the other Christ permitting himself to be touched, caressed, swept over and his feet embraced by an errant woman.

We are at the mid-point of Lent. The institution is closing in on Jesus. The Pharisees and the legalists ~~are~~ are fomenting trouble. Jesus is aware of his fate - and knows that he must live it out. What message is there for us?

Fay offers us a 5 question dragon-bite kit:

1. Do you celebrate life for its own sake?
2. Do you seek to know injustice, human suffering, the neglected & forgotten, the weak & innocent who suffer - or are you afraid to be one of these. The pallidist says "Yahweh, is always on the side of the oppressed." Ps. 103:6.



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- ~~3. Do you truly serve? Do you organize
(+ maybe even institutionalize when
that's the only or best way) attempts
to relieve the pain + injustice around
you?~~
- ~~4. Are you honest to yourself?~~
- ~~5. Are you manipulated + manipulating?
Are you used by other dragons.~~

A good dragon bite kit that we can
take along our spiritual journey contains
these natural or creation ecstasies

1. Experience nature: Our spiritual
lives begin + end in the refreshment
of the earth + sea, mountains +
skies, flowers + sunshine. Become
one + matter, creation
2. Friendship: Mutual attraction +
sharing that reaches to a
point of forgetfulness of self -
experience the ecstasy of one-
ness + a good friend. Can
you laugh to or even at / or be
laughed to or even at by a good
friend. This may or may not
include sexual ecstasy.
3. Physical activity - walk, run, swim, hike
Be at one + your own body. Know
it and what it is capable of -
but not engage in violent sport
where you or another can be
hurt.
4. Think - Learn something new
about something you enjoy

purely for your own pleasure - but
avoid thinking to control, manipulate
or rationalize.

4. Experience another culture / travel-
vacation when you need it. Visit
people you love + haven't seen.
Be at one w people you think you
maybe could not be. Grow in
your experience of what humanity
means.

5. Suffer a little. Work w someone
who is physically or mentally
challenged or striving to overcome
a difficulty in his/her life. Be
aware of life/suffering/death
as possibilities for us all - and
not necessarily as evils, but as
part of the human condition.

6. Serve. Share w others your
capacities. Pass on your joy
of living to others. Work in an
ecstasy-producing field. Teach,
create, pass on ecstasy to others.
Maybe we need to stop relying
on pseudo ecstasies - like higher
salaries, titles on the door, or
other signs of the institutional
dragon + just find work we
truly enjoy. Stop enduring work
& really enjoy. Work endured can
never produce ecstasy.

7. Laugh, sing, cry - Be at one w your
emotions. Know your anger, your
pain, your joy. Unite your emotions
w your body + all of them w your

intellect. have God in all your mind,
soul, body, + spirit.

8. Don't be afraid to be sensual
spiritual! Take Jesus as model,
get close to God as mother as well
as father. Be at one in God + let
your God-consciousness pervade
your life so that you are one
and at-one. At-onement - since
it's Lent - means at-one-ment.
Don't be afraid of the ability of
Jesus Christ to help you be at one
in God through the at-onement.

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As we come to the lessons this morning, I'd like to focus on two words. The first is Covenant. As the seasonal team prepared for Lent, we were struck by the choice of readings and how they appeared to set one theme and build upon it each week. The first theme which struck us was Covenant.

As we began Lent we were called together by very powerful words spoken by the prophet Joel. He was calling the people back to God, to return and repent, to seek God's healing. Through the Old Testament lessons we too have been called back to look at God and what he has been doing with his creatures we call humanity.

The lesson for Lent 1 spoke to us of the Noahic covenant. The Lord would no longer destroy ~~the~~ ^{humanity} by water. It was a covenant of life promised and it was a covenant to last forever. As a sign of the covenant, he placed the rainbow in the clouds. Not as a reminder to us but rather a reminder to himself "When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature." Gen 9: 11, 15a.

This lesson was followed by one of the Old Testament's most dramatic accounts. God had established his covenant with Abraham and had promised him that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars or the grains of ~~sand~~ sand on the beach. Yet God asked Abraham to sacrifice his only son. This was a test of the covenant and as the ^{account} unfolds we discover that Abraham is just as serious about his end of the covenant as God is.

Looking through the Old Testament though we soon discover this isn't always the case with Israel. They are a stubborn people who want covenant on their own terms. Sound familiar? Yet Yahweh is consistently active in His love and care for His people ^{that} while they are in Egypt; He delivers them through a series of miracles and impossibilities to bring them back to him, to a place where no fear nor harm can touch them.

Each time God deals with his people, he redefines and reinstates his covenant. "I will be their God; they will be my people." Cent 3 brought us back to the covenant and introduced a deeper facet of it: The Law. We heard the Ten Commandments read to us, the beginning of a code which would be a standard Israel was to judge itself by. This was to be their end of the bargain.

It didn't take long for them to break covenant with God. Cent 4 speaks of the exile. Yet even in exile God gave them promise of deliverance and liberation and brought them once again out of captivity.

This morning we hear new words, a promise of a new covenant (Jer 31:33,34) Words of hope, words of promise: I will be their God, they will be my people; I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more. This new covenant is realized in Jesus Christ.

Traditionally the fifth Sunday of Lent was known as Passion Sunday. The Gospel was the passion account taken from one of the synoptic gospels. It began the two-week period of Lent called paschaltide, when we were asked to focus once again on Jesus' death and resurrection.

Today's gospel focuses on two images. The first is the grain of wheat, the second, the cross. Jesus says that the grain of wheat must die so it can bear much fruit; the Son of God must be lifted up so as to draw all men into him. In between these two images are two powerful calls: We are called to lose all so as to gain life and we are ~~told~~ ^{called} to follow; to serve.

As I said before, the new covenant is realized in Jesus Christ. ~~Humanity~~ ^{Humanity} cannot remain faithful to God in a covenant relationship. Every time God established covenant with ~~man~~ ^{us}, ~~we~~ ^{we} ~~blew~~ it. Jesus' death and resurrection remedied that. By God taking on humanity he was able to establish an unbreakable covenant. Because Jesus' death fulfilled the law, covenant is firmly established. We are given signs of this covenant in baptism and the Eucharist. We remember his death, we remember his resurrection, we remember the covenant.

Because of the cross our end of the bargain is taken care of. We are no longer under the law, we are under grace. Although the covenant is fulfilled and we are no longer required to live by the law, we are not free of responsibility.

The second word I want to focus on is discipleship. The Epistles and Gospels of Lent have focused on Jesus and his obedience to his father and how that example is to be an example for us. We are called to serve God through love, to choose to follow, to lose all to gain. We are given a free choice to love God thru our actions and we are given a new commandment: to love one another.

During this lent I have been reading Dietrich Bonhoeffer's

The Cost of Discipleship. In it Bonhoeffer explores what it means to be a disciple and the cost. As Christians we are called to do something which is even stronger than the expectations of the Old Testament law. Bonhoeffer says "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." obedience is a word filled with all sorts of bad press, yet for the Christian it is the essence of life. It is obedience to the Cross's implications which has spoken out to this world. When we look at people like Bonhoeffer, Dr King, Dorothy Day, Mother Theresa, and the ~~priests~~ ~~and other religious~~ who have been martyred in El Salvador and other parts of Latin America, we see obedience to Christ. One of the people whose sense of obedience was so rooted in love & has effected my life is Jim Elliot. He was martyred by those he sought to bring the gospel of life to. and he saw that martyrdom as a call to life. (COD p 98)

We ~~are~~ ^{may} not ^{be} ~~all~~ called to do what these people have done, but we are called to look at the ~~gospel~~ ^{scripture} and at Jesus and respond. We have free will, obedience doesn't deny that at all. what it says is: I will to do your will, whatever the cost, whatever the consequence (COD p 10)

As we move into this passiontide, let's try to challenge each other and encourage one another to be disciples, to make a difference. that our lives will cause those around us to say like the Greeks in today's gospel; "Sir we wish to see Jesus."

the Lord's Supper, and the Lord's Supper is a memorial of the Lord's death.

no Christian is called to be something which is never stronger than the expectation of the Old Testament law. "God's law is not a burden, but a privilege," says the apostle.

calls a man to love him who loves him, and the Christian is called to love him who loves him.

is a man filled with all sorts of love, and the Christian is called to love him who loves him.

the Christian is called to love him who loves him, and the Christian is called to love him who loves him.

is the Christian's inheritance, which is the Christian's inheritance, which is the Christian's inheritance.

this world. When we look at people like this, we see the Christian's inheritance, which is the Christian's inheritance.

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Ever since I have been in MCC I have been aware of a very important, profound & disturbing fact — and one that has affected my life in disturbing ways: Men are different from most women — particularly feminist women. Now, before MCC this wasn't too important. I was a nurse and most of my co-workers + superiors were women, and we got along & get along even now pretty well. When I was a teacher most of my co-workers + principals were women & we got along & get along well,

well, then I came into MCC & instantly found myself surrounded by men — which is a pretty strange place for a lesbian — a feminist lesbian at that. I have been alternately roaring with laughter, crying my head off, screaming, & ready to commit suicide. In the interest of my own sanity and probably some of yours, I am preaching this sermon.

Let me start w/ an obvious fact. Men & women are different! We are socialized differently. Some of us — mainly women — are socialized to expect to be addressed, until somebody comes & rescues us. Some of us are raised to be helpers & nurturers & hearers — again mostly women. Some of us are raised to be lords & masters — mostly men.

We become Christians and meet w/ this person Jesus and learn about servant hood & we believe — we believe — mostly we believe that servant hood will imply that all of us will be servants & so it comes w/ great shock in most churches that servant hood will mean literally

that for the women — we will cook + serve and be rewarded in the annual women's day service — While the men pastor, are the Board of Deacons, make decisions, give orders and get most of the emotional + intellectual rewards.

Then MCC — and I was permitted — at some cost — to pastor and found that in spite of that I was still beholden to + had to ask "May I" of a group of men all along the way. As I have found myself in those situations I have been amazed at the requirements. Women are asked to accept that men know how things should be done. That men — by being more logical, of course, make better decisions and know better than the little women, who, of course, are emotional creatures and could not possibly know what men do.

Let me look at this from a spiritual point of view. This, ^{my} brothers, is ersatz spirituality. It is an ecstasy trip at bargain plates — and the goal of the trip is to inflate the ego, narcissistically, by increasing one's concern in one's own image, identity + self worth — often at the cost of another — usually at the cost of some woman.

This dragon purchases kills our souls by convincing us that our egos can best be placated + made content by our playing our roles by sexually predetermined definitions of how we should feel + act. Men don't cry or express emotion, women don't think logically or manage

things well. When we buy into this we are condemning ourselves & others to a non-experience of God. The healthy soul is both male & female, anima & animus; both in God's image. Male & female created God them.

Let's look at social expectations

His
order
control
aggressiveness
logic
competition
giving
reason
logos

Hers
creativity
respect unique differences
relaying
rejoicing
intuition
receiving
feeling
eros

Jesus, for me — personifies the anima not the animus & his whole problem — the paradox of his time was that he was not logical, legalistic & competitive — He was emotional — wept over the state of Jerusalem; drove out the money-changers in a bout of anger, cried when his friends died; and said to that friend's sister that she had chosen a better way to turn her back against the servant role and yet it was a role he accepted.

As your pastor, I need to speak to this church about sexism. The weekend of our last fund-raiser I became aware that once again women had been so subtly pushed into servant hood here at MCC. We, the women, few in number that we were were in the majority of helpers in the kitchen

One woman is still angry @ me because I did not do the shortcake correctly — but I found myself taking ticket money, & selling drink tickets, tending bar & trying to watch broccoli & biscuits in the oven from the other side of the room. One woman has been running the coffee hour for months & she & I have been baking cakes for months. There are, at best 6 or 7 women who come to Church regularly. One night 3 of us were in the service & I were in the Chair.

Where are the men? Is servanthood to be accepted by a small group of men while the majority sit idly by? Or is servanthood something we all share.

On the other hand, when decision-making is going on & men sit on our board & one woman. Two of those men have very real tasks — and do them. Two make decisions — and the sexism is apparent in that decision-making. Logic & reason become our gods, not God. Honesty is lost in political rectitude & when this becomes painful & emotional — the sexism is rampant. Do not grieve — no sorrow over the way things are being done / just management by objectives — make-think reigns.

What is important here is that our God-consciousness is lost.

women's emancipation and the taking of our places in the church does not only mean the accommodation of women to a world that is fashioned & administered and determined by men. True emancipation is not interested in simply parrotting the ideals of former oppressors, though from a different & outworn point. It means a different design. It abandons the view - as Dorothea Schlegel says - that brutality is the most manly virtue & adaptability the most womanly & human traits.

Men will have to give up their unquestioned authority, and women will have to exercise authority - but we must not, either of us, men or women think only of ourselves as autonomous & independent. God, is spoken of as having aseity (self-derived existence) raised to infinite power. Christianity can only arise if we dismiss this God once & for all. Christ - in contrast to the male God usually worshipped & adored - is a God who had no special privileges. He abandoned them. He left heaven, assumed servant's clothes, became vulnerable, hungry, thirsty & mortal. When will we all learn to love this God who is without power & rule. When can we radically turn to Christ without fear & desire for special privilege.

When will we be emancipated enough
for men as well as women to
weep over the state of our Jerusalem -
our Church because it is faulty &
inhuman, & untrue to the Christ
who calls us.

It is difficult at best to be a woman
pastor of a church which is primarily
male. I am not at home in
your world - I was not socialized
to your expectations & means. And
I do not want to be. I am still
working out what a feminist woman's
role as minister should be.

I know what it is not. It is not the
traditional female servant role, and
I have asked the women not to do
the coffee hour any longer - It is a
simple gesture - but it says: Men,
if you want coffee, make coffee.
If you want cake, make cake. If
you want fund-raisers, run fundraisers.
Take on the servant role that Christ has
given you as a model. For women
who have traditionally been in that role,
Christ offers another way, a better way:
Forget the kitchen and begin to sit
at the side of Christ & see what God &
Christ can mean in modern women's
lives. For the women who are here,
I invite you to join with me in an
exploration of what Christianity can
mean.

Last night my daughter took me to
a performance of Pirates, a futuristic

metaphor
fantasy of life post the Holocaust —
a vision which feminist women
imagine often in their writings —
and I realized that women are evolving
a true spiritual journey — for that was
the metaphor here — a sea journey —
with rituals + healing + deep psychological
meaning. And I know that I was
caught up in it + spiritually moved.

I do not want to turn from Christianity —
but so long as Christianity denies feeling
+ emotion ~~and passion~~ and sensuality,
and centers on logic + reason + the denial
of the body, I will have only two
alternatives. 1. To leave the Church
which is my mother, my lover, my
friend — for a new lover, mother,
friend in women's spirituality.

The second is to reclaim the Church for
women — for emotion, feeling + embodiment —
which will be good for all of us, and
to help men live out their calling to
servant hood as well as to help women
meet Christ's Challenge to us to seek a
better way. If I love my God, my
Christ + my Church — there is no
other way.



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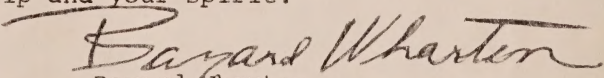
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Thank you for your help and your spirit.



Bayard Wharton

Chairman of Disaster Services
Providence Chapter, ANRC



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Chairman of Disaster Services
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